

ORTHODOX WORSHIP

Praying to Saints

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Intercession of the Saints

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Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, has taught us that through Holy Baptism we are made members of His Holy Body, the Church: (Jn. 17:21-23; 15:5). This is the goal of the Christian; to abide in the Lord forever. For this reason God became man, was crucified and resurrected.

This same teaching has been passed down to us by Saint Paul:

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 12:27). The Church is one body, the body of Christ and although we are unworthy, our Lord is the Head of the Church and allows us to be members of His Body (Eph. 1:22-23). As members of the Body of Christ, we abide in the Lord and we partake of eternal life; “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? “The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

The union within the Body of Christ is indivisible. Nothing can separate us from Christ and the other members of the Body of Christ, unless we ourselves choose to abandon Christ. Not even death separates us from the Body of Christ (Mat. 16:20). The mutual love of those who are members of the Body of Christ is in no wise severed or broken by death (Rom. 14:8).

In the Body of Christ all the members who have been granted the grace to abide in Him are united to our Saviour even though there is a difference in the grace imparted to each (2 Tim. 2:20). All those who by their sins are not cut off and separated from the Body of

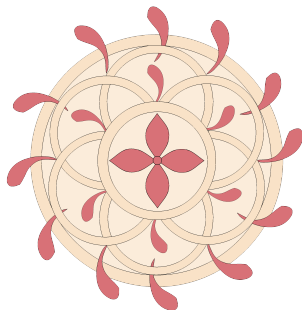
body. We have a soul capable of “self-transcendence.” This unusual power is our ability to rise by prayer and contemplation beyond nature to the spiritual world, above the common state of affairs and to contact non-material things and to speak with the Angels even as our Blessed Mother did. The human spirit knows no real barriers. The body may limit our activities but it cannot destroy them.

“Nonsense,” someone might remark, “what evidence do you have from the Holy Scriptures for this fantastic doctrine?” Is it not true that Moses went up into the mountain to pray for the success of his people against the Amalekites and whenever he lifted his arms to pray for the Israelites they were victorious and when he stopped Amalek conquered? Now, if Moses exercised such power while on earth is it reasonable to assume that he is no longer influential in heaven with God? Has he forgotten us? Has he forgotten to love us now? There are many such illustrations in the Scriptures.

Can the death of the body obliterate the soul’s love, memories, and desires? Indeed, God would be cruel if death of the body cuts our beloved friends and family from us. This would be cruel, but God is just and merciful. And surely, the love they bore us is intensified in heaven where there is nothing but love. As long as men live on earth the Saints (all in heaven are Saints) will not forget us, they cannot, because the Church is one, and love unifies, and unity brings love.

Intercession of the Saints

By Archpriest Michael Azkoul



How is it that the Saints in heaven can hear the voices of men on earth? How can the awkward, stumbling words of deceitful men disturb the Blessed? There is a vast space-time complex, called the universe, between heaven and earth. Heaven is one reality and earth another.

These are questions that are asked of the Christian community concerning Intercession. (There are others, also, but we are concerned here specifically with the single problem of how it is possible that heaven and earth can even communicate). These questions can be answered with reasonable satisfaction: firstly, what does death of the body have over the soul? And does not the Sacrifice on Calvary mean the reconciliation of the mortal and the immortal, time and eternity? And secondly, what is heaven? It certainly is not, according to Christian tradition, a place. Heaven is not a place with a locality determined by physical boundaries, it is a state of being. Heaven is not a place in space and time, but a type of existence in eternity.

Thus, it is absurd to ask “how is it that the Saints in that place far-far away can hear the words of men down here on earth?” This merely betrays the objector’s ignorance of the nature of heaven and spiritual reality. Those in heaven do not see with the limited eye, hear with the limited ear, or speak with the limited tongue, since they are not as we are. They are bodiless spirits until the Judgment Day.

I doubt whether even we mortals on earth are incarcerated by the

Christ, remain vessels in the House of the Lord. They remain united to the Saviour and to each other as members of the same Body.

Through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, we are united to each other and to the Saints who are the vessels of gold and silver.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

Saint Paul tells us that the Saints are the foundation of the Church and that we are eternally united to them in Christ through the bond of love.

This bond of love is the realization of our Lord’s commandment (Jn. 13:34-35). This bond of love led Saint Paul and all the other Saints to minister to those entrusted to their care (2 Cor. 6:4-6). The ministry of Saint Peter was founded on the bond of love; And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep (Jn. 21:17).

It is this bond of love that keeps the members of the Body of Christ; the members of His Church together: From whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16). When Saint Paul speaks of every joint and every part he does not exclude those who have reposed in the Lord. Every joint and every part means every member. It is in this context of the bond of love that we pray for each other (James 5:16). When we pray to the Saints we are asking the righteous to pray for us because we know that it “availeth much”. From the very Apostolic days of the Church we see Christians praying for each other and asking for each others prayers (Col. 1:9; Thes. 5:25).

There are those who believe that these Saints cannot pray for us because they are dead. Throughout the Holy Scriptures, however, we find the belief that in Christ all are alive and united to each other. It is for this reason that the Holy Disciples, Peter, John and James, were able to behold the Holy Prophets Elijah and Moses conversing with

our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is for this reason that our Lord refers to the Kingdom of Heaven as it were an abiding in Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22), abiding with the Saints.

The Kingdom of Heaven is referred to as "Abraham's bosom" because Patriarch Abraham is the father of the children of faith (Rom. 4:13-16; Gal. 3:7). As we see in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:23), Patriarch Abraham is alive and aware of our spiritual condition (Luke 16:31).

If we are to believe that there is no bond between those who have not yet reposed in the Lord and those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven how do we explain the sending of angels to reveal the word of the Lord. When the Holy Prophets such as Moses and Isaiah and Ezekiel and Daniel and Saint Paul saw the Lord, were they in the flesh and in the Kingdom of Heaven, the Seventh Heaven, at the same time? When Saint John entered the Kingdom of Heaven and received the Word of God which he wrote in the Book of Revelation, he was still in the flesh (Rev. 1:1).

Let us look at how Saint John described the Kingdom of Heaven:

And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold (Rev. 4:4).

These elders described by Saint John are our spiritual fathers and brothers who have gone before us to the Kingdom of Heaven and were placed on the right side of the Lord. As spiritual fathers and brothers who love us, they comfort us with the assurance that they pray to the Lord for our salvation, just as we pray for each other. The great difference is that as Saint James tells us, their prayer, the prayer of the righteous, availeth much (James 5:16). Saint John confirms the love of the Saints when he reveals to us the words of comfort uttered by these Saints (Rev. 5:5).

In his description of the Kingdom of Heaven, Saint John informs us of the countless multitudes that are there along with the Elders (Rev. 6:9-10). This great multitude of Holy Martyrs in the Kingdom of Heaven were aware of the continuing persecution and were praying to the Lord for an end to the tribulations of their persecuted brethren still in the flesh.

From the description of Saint John we see different Saints:

Evangelists, Elders, Martyrs, Virgins: "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (cf. Rev. 7:9; Rev. 14:1-5).

With the Resurrection of our Lord the barrier of Death was overcome and we cannot refer to the Saints as dead: Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him (Luke 20:37). They, as well as we, are members of the Household of God; Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God (Eph. 2:19). The Saints are our older brothers and sisters who love us and it is for this reason that when our Lord comes again He will bring all these Saints with Him so that they can receive us into the Kingdom of Heaven: To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints (1 Thes. 3:13); And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints (Jude 14).

We who are members of the Church of Christ are aware of their living presence. Just as we pray for each other, we ask those who are before the Throne of God, to pray for us. We pray that our Saviour will keep us as members of His Body, forever numbered among the Saints.

Father Panagiotēs Carras